DAY OF DAYS

The BBC prepared as carefully for D-Day as the military themselves. The War Correspondents needed to be assigned and placed with utmost precision, so that every phase of the operation was sufficiently covered, so that they could get their reports and despatches out to Broadcasting House as quickly as possible, and so that they weren't right in the thick of the fighting and didn't risk having their bodies shredded by dozens of machine-gun bullets before dying in a pile of their own offal. And it all had to be arranged in extreme secrecy. Covering the invasion was a military operation in itself, and it came with a military pep talk from A. P. Ryan, Controller of News:

"*...You handful of men have been chosen to undertake the most important assignment known to broadcasting. Good luck.*"††

D-Day was to become one of the first massively hyped rolling news events, with the entire country huddled around their radios through the first week of June, expecting John Snagge to announce the invasion at any second. As the wait dragged on (the invasion was postponed due to the weather, like an unusually violent day's play at Wimbledon) some red meat was thrown at them on the fourth of June with the fall of Rome, a major Allied victory soundtracked with the bells of St Peter's Basilica.

That was nice and all, especially to the Catholic population, but it wasn't the big moment. That finally came on June 6th at 9:30 am, when the BBC finally announced the Allied landing on mainland Europe. The various Allied forces and Governments involved had wanted them to sit on it a little bit longer, announcing it only when they were ready. The BBC pre-empted any official Allied word about the invasion on the basis that German radio had already broadcast a newsflash to the effect that "oh bugger they've landed over there instead" at 7:00, so the mere existence of the invasion was hardly a secret to anyone important anymore. The BBC gave the Allies time to whip an official D-notice or something, and when an hour went by with no sign of any official censorship orders, they unleashed Snagge and let it be known.

New reports and information came in dribs and drabs over the course of the day, in a creakingly slow prototype of rolling news. The first eyewitness account came (from a reporter stationed on a Mitchell bomber) after the One O'Clock News. A couple of hours later, Charles de Gaulle showed up to send a message to the people of France. As the people of Britain came home from work and immediately gravitated to the radio, the sound of the entire population of the country listening to the same thing simultaneously must have been almost palpable. Finally, after the Nine O'Clock News and an address from the King, the all-new War Report made its debut, and changed the public

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perception of both the war and news broadcasting forever.

For the first time, people at home could hear the voices of those, thousands of miles away, laying their lives on the line in a wilderness of bullets and shells. They could hear the actual, authentic sounds of battle - no popping balloons and other Foley effects, but the real thing. They could hear Dimbleby, Gillard, Talbot and the rest describing the carnage in detail from directly in front of it. The war - and news itself - had come home.

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